

# Coronavirus Community Updates

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Coronavirus Community Updates

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CARES Act Required Website Posting Information (UMM)

Published: May 29, 2020

CARES Act Required Website Posting Information (UMaine)

Published: May 28, 2020

UMS work and pay guidance, May 7

Published: May 08, 2020

Advisory groups leading fall planning, April 27

Published: April 28, 2020

CARES Act Distribution to Students Expected Week of May 4

Published: April 24, 2020

*Note: These UMaine/UMM FAQs are subject to change at any time. Please check this site regularly for the latest information as it becomes available. The most recent additions and changes are at the top of this page. Last modified June 1, 2020.*

The Office of the Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate School, in collaboration with other offices at the University of Maine, continues to monitor COVID-19 developments that may impact research and graduate studies. We are available to assist the university community with information and support. As needed, we also are available to provide assistance to University of Maine System campuses for COVID-19-related questions pertaining to sponsored research activity.

## On-Campus Research and Fieldwork

### What research is allowed on-campus and in the field?

Currently on-campus and fieldwork research and scholarly activity are limited to *essential activities* and require approval. While "essential research and scholarly activity" is defined below, we would like to clarify that all research/scholarship conducted away from field sites and university facilities (e.g. conducted at home) may continue without approval, including "essential research and scholarly activity". **We are requesting census information about research and scholarly activity being conducted away from field sites and university facilities via the same form with a subset of information and no approval needed.** We wish to encourage researchers and scholars working in areas not considered "essential" to continue their work under the new conditions we all now face. **Also, please note, students would report through their advisors.**

### What are essential research and scholarly activities?

Effective June 1, 2020, we have entered Phase Two of the [Plan for Phased Continuity of the Research Enterprise](#) where essential research and scholarly activity (that require working on campus or in the field) have been expanded to include the following areas (the bullets in bold below are new additional criteria):

- Research and scholarly activity that is critical to the health of the public
- Research and scholarly activity of national or state importance
- Research and scholarly activity that involves the protection of valuable resources such as cell lines, animal lines, instrumentation requiring regular attention, etc. which cannot be shut down and must be kept going at a basal level
- Research and scholarly activities that directly support current Business and Operations designated as critical infrastructure in the Governor's mandate: general university research and scholarly activities in those designated areas would not typically qualify as "essential".**
- Research and scholarly activity necessary to avoid prematurely stopping an experiment or research process in progress that would result in an irrecoverable loss.
- Research and scholarly activity necessary because experimentation or related activities for the coming year are tightly linked to seasonal phenology and even a short delay will result in long term impact.

**Further, under Phase 2, personnel density will be increased in a manner that is consistent with federal, state, and UMS guidelines and directives. Temporal and spatial distancing should be maintained, with precautions like face coverings when they cannot be maintained. Under this phase:**

- Prioritize access for graduate students and postdocs close to completing their degree/term of appointment**
- Prioritize research for completion of grants and contracts where no cost extensions are not feasible**
- Prioritize research activities which are required to maintain employment of critical research personnel**
- Begin re-breeding laboratory animals, expansion of cell lines, plant propagation, etc.**
- Research Centers: restart facilities based on sufficient 'customer' demand (approved projects) where work cannot be done remotely and those facilities have approved safety protocols, PPE, tracking mechanisms in place**
- Allow access to offices for graduate students on application, 1-3 days/week. Must maintain physical distancing and max occupancy per building (scheduling software?)**
- Field Research - expand on case by case basis (depending on local conditions/restrictions at field sites, travel restrictions, ability to travel safely and ability to physically distance at field sites)**
- Humanities, arts and social sciences research that requires access to single occupancy spaces (e.g. office, private studio), and allow use of libraries, archives, labs, and collections to limited numbers of researchers using hygiene and physical distancing protocols. Close proximity training such as a clinical environment/ lab/ performance space/ practice/ studio element [or other special delivery mode (lab training, graduate mentoring)] requires face coverings, hand hygiene, disinfection**
- Other activities to consider: Explore options for expanded on-campus library research options. Prioritize researchers with deadlines (tenure, book contracts, etc.)**

### What is the Plan for Phased Continuity of the Research Enterprise?

The phased plan to re-open research at UMaine is based on federal, state and UMaine system guidance, and the scientific evidence around COVID-19 infection control. The phases outlined align with the current State of Maine phased reopening plans. In the event of an increase in COVID-19 cases in the state, or changes to state or UMS guidelines, these phases can be reverted back to an earlier phase (as appropriate given public health concerns). The complete plan is available [online](#).

**Can you provide examples of requests that have been approved and those that have been, or will be, denied?**

Examples of some of the requests approved to date:

- (Fieldwork) Deployment of weather stations in Maine blueberry farms and field scouting for disease. Data provide real-time information to blueberry growers to help them time fungicide application to control diseases in their fields.
- (On-Campus) Numerous requests for periodic access to maintain critical equipment and check on incubators, freezers, chem stores etc.
- (On-campus) Numerous requests to maintain cell, fish and mouse lines to maintain critical stocks.
- (On-campus) Several requests related to activities supporting public health in battling COVID-19 (3-D printing of PPE, production of hand sanitizer for area hospitals etc.)
- (On-Campus) Tick Lab operations
- (Fieldwork) Apple Integrated Pest Management Program. Provides growers with advisories based on real-time observations from ~20 orchards in the commercial apple production area. Growers depend on this information to make immediate pest management decisions.
- Research performed by graduate students needed to graduate or complete a thesis

Examples of some of the requests that have been or will be denied:

- Research being performed where social distancing has not been demonstrated in the request or cannot be maintained
- Research being performed in order to get preliminary results for a future proposal submission
- Submission requests that lack clarity or sufficient detail

### How do I get approval to conduct my essential research and scholarly activity?

Essential research and scholarly activity which involves activity on the University of Maine's Orono or Machias campuses, its other facilities in the state, and/or activity in the field, requires approval at this time. These requests should continue to be submitted using the [request form](#) which has been in place since March 24th. The request form requires a justification for why the activity cannot be delayed, why it is essential research as defined above, information regarding the associated research personnel (including students) and the steps that will be taken to ensure the safety of participants during the COVID-19 pandemic. Several forms must also be uploaded with the submission, the [Hierarchy of Control \(HOC\)](#) and the [Safety Checklist](#). These forms are required by the UMaine Emergency Operations Center (EOC) for review of the safety aspects of the activity.

### What is the institutional approval process for essential activity requests?

Requests will be sent to the applicable College or Center and the [Research Continuity Task Force](#) for their respective review and recommendation regarding approval. Requests must then be routed to the UMaine Emergency Operations Center (EOC) for review of the safety aspects of the activity. Requests approved by both the OVPDRGS and the EOC will be communicated to the individual with a copy to the applicable college/center and will also be shared with Safety Management, Facilities Management, and University Police. Individuals may be contacted by one or more of these offices if more information is needed.

Note: Should the Research Continuity Task Force be unable to reach consensus, the VPRDGS will review the request and make the final determination.

If an individual wishes to submit an appeal, they should initiate the appeal with the applicable College or Center with the additional information to be considered; the appeal will be handled via the same review and approval process as the initial request.

### When should submitters expect notification of approval or denial?

Review of essential activity requests have been designated as a high priority by OVPDRGS; ideally the goal is to provide a response within 3-4 business days, however much is dependent upon how quickly it is reviewed by the College/Center, reviewed by the EOC, and the complexity/scope of the request. Tammy Crosby sends a reminder to the College/Center if she has not received a determination within 2 days.

**Please provide more about how the information provided by researchers will be used. Will the form be used as a data collection tool as well as a method to inform directors and deans if research is essential?**

Yes, to both: Directors and Deans (or their designees) will be conducting the initial determination regarding essentiality before the request is reviewed by the Research Continuity Task Force, EOC, and the OVPDRGS, and will also be copied on the communications with the final determination. Further, the approved requests will be shared with Safety Management, Facilities and University Police so that each area is aware of the activity on campus or in the field.

### What are the guidelines for research lab operations?

[Research lab guidelines are available on the Office of Research Compliance website.](#)

### What should I do about disposal of hazardous waste?

Visit the [UMS Safety and Environmental Services Portal](#) for more Information.

## University of Maine Research Administration

### What is the impact on proposal deadlines and award actions/subawards?

Our federal sponsors are monitoring the situation closely and may extend application deadlines if most conditions associated with COVID-19 worsen. If federal agencies officially close, submitted proposals will most likely remain in a queue and awards may be delayed, pending resumption of normal operations, as has been the case during federal budget-related shutdowns. [Find research-related updates online at this link.](#)

### How should I notify my grantor of programmatic impacts and request project extensions?

All communications with external sponsors regarding project impacts from COVID-19 must be coordinated with the Office of Research Administration. Please provide your ORA central office representative with any proposed communication for review. Contact information: ora@maine.edu; 581.1484

**Should I notify my sponsor if certain project activities of a funded research project cannot be completed or have to be suspended as a result of COVID-19?**

Yes. Please coordinate any communication to a sponsor with ORA. Examples of impact include: canceling a funded conference, inability to conduct fieldwork because of travel restrictions, inability to meet the scheduled deliverables or aims/goals/SOW, absence of PI or key person for more than 90 days. Contact information: ora@maine.edu; 581.1484

### Are travel cancellation costs due to COVID-19 allowable as direct charges to sponsored projects?

[Find research-related updates online at this link.](#) Make sure to document these unanticipated costs for potential recovery.

**Will the Office of Research Administration's proposal submission timeline be waived for proposals related to the study of COVID-19?**

Given the urgency of federal agencies and other sponsors to immediately begin studies related to COVID-19 and its long term effects, the university will prioritize all such proposal opportunities. Please begin by submitting your Notice of Intent in PARS. Upon receipt, ORA will coordinate with the Office of Research Development and other offices to mobilize all available resources to assist with the submission.

### Have funding agencies released specific guidance?

Find an updated list of funding agency guidance and other [research-related updates online at this link.](#)

**Is UMaine's Office of Research Administration available to assist other UMS campuses with COVID-19-related questions pertaining to sponsored activity?**

As needed, UMaine's Office of Research Administration is available to provide assistance to UMS campuses, faculty and staff for COVID-19-related questions pertaining to sponsored activity. Such inquiries can be directed to [ora@maine.edu](#); 207.581.1484.

## University of Maine Research Compliance

### What should I do to plan for the continuation of my research with respect to research compliance?

[Research compliance guidelines are available on the Office of Research Compliance website.](#)

## Off-Campus Research

### What is considered off-campus research?

Field work, research at cooperating and affiliated institutions, internships and practicum.

### What policies and procedures apply to off-campus research?

All policies and procedures that apply to on-campus research also apply to off campus. Additional policies and procedures may be required by off-site entities.

## Undergraduate Research

### Will undergraduate researchers be permitted on campus to work in research labs?

Yes. Undergraduate researchers must coordinate with their research mentor. On-campus students must seek an exemption from to remain living in a residence hall. A statement from their research mentor should be submitted with the exemption request. Conducting the work remotely must be given first priority. Except regarding the federal work study students, who are subject to federal work study rules, all rules that apply to staff working on-campus, also apply to students working on campus.

### Will summer research programs proceed as planned?

At this time no changes have been made, but this may change.

## Office of Research Development

### Will Research Development support continue during COVID-19?

During the UMaine and UMM COVID-19 response, the Office of Research Development is available to support faculty, staff, and students developing their research programs. [More information is available on our site.](#)

## Graduate School FAQs

**How will course grading change for graduate level courses (500 and above) as a result of the transition to remote learning?**

Due to smaller class sizes and discussion-oriented mode of instruction, graduate level courses are often easily adapted to a remote learning format, and so, no change in grading will be necessary for the majority of graduate courses. However, because of the potential impact on graduate students for childcare, or from the illness of the student or family members due to COVID-19, instructors are encouraged to be flexible to the greatest degree possible in allowing late assignments and granting incomplete grades.

The following guidelines outline the pass/fail grading policy for graduate courses:

- All graduate courses that were originally listed as online/distance education courses will remain under the originally established grading option.
- Most graduate courses are small, seminar courses that are easily adaptable to a remote learning format. However, at the discretion of the instructor, and taking individual program accreditation requirements into account, courses that are not easily adaptable to a remote learning format, including experiential learning courses (e.g. laboratories, practica, clinical experiences, internships) may be converted to a P/F grading option, if not already in this grading format.
- Undergraduate students may individually declare the pass/fail grading option in a graduate course unless the course was originally listed as an online course or unless the course credits were to be used in partial fulfillment of the requirements of a graduate degree (e.g. 4+1 programs).
- Undergraduate students may use the credits in a graduate course that has been changed to a pass/fail grading option in partial fulfillment of the requirements of a graduate degree.
- Graduate students may use the credits from a 400 level course with a pass/fail grading option in partial fulfillment of the requirements of a graduate degree as long as the course is approved by the program and the Graduate School to count for the degree.

### Will Stodder Hall remain open for graduate students?

Students must request an exemption from the Graduate School to remain in the residence hall.

### What are the plans for graduate students who use the overnight accommodations in Stodder Hall?

Given that on-campus instruction has been suspended, any future room reservations will be placed on hold and reviewed on a case by case basis. Please contact the Graduate School (207.581.3291) for more information.

**Should UMaine graduate research assistants and graduate teaching assistants continue to report to work like other university employees?**

Most graduate assistantship (research, teaching, and work-study) appointments will remain in effect until the appointment end date, although work conditions may be adapted as necessary. Graduate assistants should check with their supervisors regarding expectations and should also report any travel outside the state to their supervisors (see FAQ on UMaine Community Members Returning to Campus). Working remotely should be done, if possible.

### How should graduate students who are planning their oral defenses to graduate in May 2020 proceed?

Any student who is planning to defend a thesis or dissertation prior to the end of the spring semester is encouraged to consult with their advisory committee about remote defenses using Zoom or another virtual meeting product. If a remote method is not possible, an exemption must be sought from the Graduate School.

### What plans are in place for prospective graduate students who would like a campus tour?

All campus tours undertaken by the Graduate School have been suspended for the remainder of the spring 2020 semester. In the interim, admissions counselors are available to meet virtually via Zoom. Contact [graduate@maine.edu](#) or 207.581.3291 to set up a remote meeting.